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ABSTRACT

An intensive course in English for business communication, offered at an institute for graduate-level teacher training in Ukraine, is described. An introductory section examines the need for and approaches to English-as-a-Second-Language teaching in Ukraine. The course consists of two main parts: a 14-week intensive general English class, titled "Starting Business Relations," and to develop basic communication skills and characteristic behavior patterns of English-speakers, and a 14-week immersion class in English business communication for a wide range of business-related contexts. This class, bearing the title "Nine Steps in London," is divided into nine steps based on a single context: a Ukrainian businessman and businesswoman visiting London. Student progress was evaluated using an oral and a listening test after the first course segment and two oral and one listening test in the second course segment. Results of the testing are provided for the first two years the course was offered (1993-94, 1994-95). It is concluded that the course was successful, with high achievement rates for most students. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

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# INTENSIVE IMMERSION ESP TEACHING IN THE UKRAINE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL RESULTS

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The intensive course of oral business communication in English is presented. The objective of the course is teaching students learning English in the Ukraine to fluently communicate orally when coming to an English-speaking country for business talks and negotiations. Communication both in the situations of everyday contacts (General English) and in the situations of business contacts (ESP - Business English) is taught. According to that the course is divided into two principal stages, and the final stage of Business English communication is designed as an immersion programme when teaching Business English is done through teaching in English some content matter in the field of business and management. The course as a whole is designed on the basis of the communicative-analytic approach, so that the domination of communication in English as the principal form of teaching/learning is combined with language focussing where it can help students' communicative competence development.

## 1.THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent years some researchers in the field of ESOL stress the necessity of "principled pragmatism" in L2 teaching, meaning rational combination of different approaches (see Kumaravadivelu, 1994). In particular, a compelling body of evidence urges linking a dominantly communicative approach to some kind of cognitive (analytic) focussing on language forms (see Dakowska, 1993; De Vriendt, 1991; Green and Hecht, 1992; Herron and Tomasello, 1992; Lightbown, 1992; VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993). If it is true in relation to ESL teaching, it is all the more true when English is taught as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking setting. The reason is the character of the purely communicative teaching, particularly in some of its extreme forms such as the Natural Approach (Terrell, 1982). It is based on giving the learner a rich variety and the greatest possible amount of comprehensible input, while totally omitting the teacher-fronted grammar instruction (Fotos, 1994, p. 323). Leaving aside the issue of rationality of such an omission in any case, it cannot but be remarked that in a non-English-speaking setting it is often impossible to supply a really great variety of rich comprehensible input; so if instruction is to be excluded into the bargain, we have very little left.

That can be illustrated by examples taken from the Ukraine or Russia where millions of adolescents and adults are learning English. All these people have practically no opportunity of gaining access to comprehensible input in English (at any rate, in oral form) outside the classroom, while the time spent in a foreign language classroom is in most cases limited to 2 or 4 hours per week. If this time is increased to 10-12 hours a week, then the course, due to objective causes, is to become short (a few months). In both cases comprehensible input just cannot be of a sufficiently great volume which necessitates a compensation. The compensation is bound to leave the communicative approach intact - as the dominant one because

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under no other approach learners can acquire communicative competence which is the why and wherefore of learning a new language.

It can be done only by a rational combination of this approach with the cognitive one attracting now growing attention in L2 teaching (O'Malley and Uhl Chamot, 1990). When the cognitive approach takes the form of conscious focussing on language forms, such an approach may be called analytic as it is bound with analysis of grammatical structures. Conscious focussing on language forms is less demanding in amount of input than subconscious grammar rule acquisition. So, it may compensate for the comprehensible input deficiency. It should be specified that in this context the analytic approach is not limited to consciousness-raising of grammar forms (Rutherford, 1987) with the aim of intake facilitation, as the structural syllabuses are called upon to do in second language acquisition - SLA (Ellis, 1993). What is also meant by using this approach in comprehensible input deficiency situation is the employment of special learning activities to facilitate learners' mastering of grammatical structures and using them in communication. It is certainly not a return to traditional formal language instruction incompatible with the communicative approach. If the approach is to be both communicative and analytic, the analytic activities must, first of all, be communication oriented, i.e., they must be designed for solving primarily communicative problems, while the task of mastering language forms is purely concomitant. Secondly, the analytic phase and its special activities should take place only after learners observed language forms functioning in communication and made attempts to employ them in their own speech without any preliminary conscious analysis. In that case mastering such forms will become communicatively meaningful for students.

The above-mentioned phase preceding analysis may be called the primary synthesis phase. Here new language forms are first introduced and observed synthetically - in the integrity of the context of communication in which they are fed to learners (comprehensible input). Neither are they separated from the integrity of speech acts that students attempt to produce in the framework of the same phase taking as a model for what is said the input just received. At this point the question of comprehensible output role in EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching in non-English setting arises. In SLA its role is a debatable issue. While in Krashen's theory (1982) only the role of input is emphasized, Swain (1985) asserts that comprehensible output is at least equally important. However controversial this issue may be in SLA, in EFL teaching/learning conditions there are hardly any grounds for controversy. How can comprehensible input deficiency be compensated for if not by consciously organizing learners' extensive practising in speech generation for communication, i.e., in comprehensible output? Such practising may begin in the primary synthesis phase immediately after the input, but here it will of necessity be largely input dependent (model-regulated quasi-communication) because new language forms received in the input are not really learned or acquired as yet. Genuine communication in the conditions which are being discussed may be launched only after the analytic phase, as its function is making language forms free for use outside the particular input context in which they were introduced. When a learner becomes independent in employing them outside this particular context, his/her comprehensible output may become fully internally regulated (by personal communicative needs, intents, personal understanding of a communicative situation etc.) .

Therefore, practising in just this kind of comprehensible output must follow the analytic phase. The new phase is best termed communicative synthesis because,

as in the first phase, the language forms are employed synthetically but in real learner-regulated communication.

Thus, the following teaching/learning pattern emerges (characterizing an approach which may be called a communicative-analytic one): primary synthesis - analysis - communicative synthesis. In this pattern the middle link (analysis) is liable to be dropped out as soon as learners master a sufficient minimum of language forms. So, at more advanced stages communicative synthesis may follow primary synthesis directly without an intermediate analysis stage.

One more assumption concerning the fundamentals of developing the EFL courses for Ukrainian (or Russian)-speaking adult and/or adolescent students learning English in their own country is the primary necessity of creating ESP courses. It is so because people in these conditions as a rule pursue some specific personal ends when they are genuinely motivated to learn a foreign language. Therefore, only various ESP courses can be made truly learners' needs-oriented. But at the same time Survival (or General) English must make a separate, best of all initial, part of any ESP course developed for the Ukraine or Russia. However specific individual learners' aims and needs in learning English may be, practically all the adolescent or adult learners in those countries have among their different stimuli for learning a common desire to make trips to English-speaking countries. For this purpose English of everyday communication is a must in any ESP syllabus.

Learners also need intensive courses of a rather short duration (up to a year) with many classhours per week because, if they do not get tangible practical results in a few months, many of them will quit. Besides, intensive courses with many class hours per week are much more effective, even when short, than long courses with few weekly classes, though their total number might be much greater than in the first case (Strevens, 1977, p. 29). Intensivity also means intensive practising of all the students. Among other things, it presupposes broad employment of technical aids (computers, audio and video aids) as they are especially useful for organizing simultaneous practising of every individual learner in a group - particularly during the analytic phase, when mastering separate language forms. In the phases of primary and communicative synthesis intensive students' practising becomes possible thanks to cooperative learning when all the learners talk in pairs or in small groups of 3-4 persons - so that the process of communication embraces all the group with every individual participating in it simultaneously with all the others.

Important is the question of making input comprehensible in the conditions of its deficiency. In this situation we cannot rely only on pictures, gestures and other non-verbal means as in the Natural Approach (Terrell, 1982). It will take too long to substantially increase the level of abstraction in the input used in an ESP course (for instance, when it is necessary to introduce abstract words and notions). To solve the problem, limited recourse to the native language of students is inevitable as an enormous amount of time and effort may be saved in this way. For example, in the primary synthesis phase learners may receive input only in English through auditory channel. Simultaneously they may be allowed (or even urged) to read the English script of what they are listening to with partial translation of this script into their native language. The script translation will provide for the full comprehension of the auditory information. Such tactics appears to be quite acceptable in view of the spreading belief that "English only" strategy in the classroom is more damaging than the limited use of the native language where it may help (Auerbach, 1993).

The above theoretical background was adopted as a basis for developing an intensive immersion ESP course to be taught in the Ukraine.

## 2. THE GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE ESP COURSE DEVELOPED

The particular kind of an ESP programme chosen for development was a course of Oral English for Business Purposes. The public need in such a course is very great in the Ukraine, but this need is satisfied insufficiently, so that the oral business communication course described below is one of the pioneers of its kind in all the countries of the former Soviet Union. The course consists of two principal parts (stages):

1. A 14-week long Survival (General) English Course (four-hour long classes 3 times a week) bearing the title "Nine Steps in London". Its purpose is to develop students' communicative skills, patterns of behaviour characteristic of English-speaking people with the aim of ensuring fluent oral communication in everyday situations inevitable for any person who has come to an English-speaking country on a short business visit (for instance, meeting and getting introduced to people, communicative contacts at the airport, custom-house, public transport, hotels, restaurants, shops and many other situations of this kind). This course is not a course of immersion as no other academic subject is taught by means of English. But developing students' communicative skills on the basis of General English, the course provides a foundation (linguistic, psychological etc.) for introducing an immersion course at the following stage.

2. A 14-week long Business Course proper under the title "Starting Business Relations" (four-hour classes held 3 times a week). It is aimed at learners' acquiring communicative skills necessary for participating in business talks on a broad range of issues. The course is based on content learning when teaching business communication is done through content matter in the sphere of business, management and marketing. Thus, this particular course is a typical immersion programme while the course as a whole in the entirety of its two principal parts may be called a case of partial or gradual immersion.

## 3. THE COURSE IN ACTION

The Survival Course "Nine Steps in London"

The materials for it include: a a student's book, a teacher's book (guidelines), a set of cassettes, software for computer-assisted learning activities.

The course is divided into nine steps united by a single plot: a Ukrainian businessman`s and businesswoman`s visit to London. This plot is developed in 19 lengthy model dialogues and polylogues embracing various everyday situations and topics of communication. All the English oral communication grammar and the vocabulary of about 1000 words sufficient for communication in ordinary everyday situations are introduced in the course as a whole (in all the model dialogues and polylogues).

The classroom activities have as their core and starting point consecutive dialogues and polylogues serving as models. The activities using one of those models as their basis constitute one unit with 3 four-hour classes per unit (one week). One step embraces a certain range of meaningfully close communicative situations and topics connected with everyday needs of a visitor to an English-speaking country.

It may contain from one to several model dialogues/polylogues each requiring one weekly unit of work. Classes in every unit are organized according to the following pattern.

The first class in it is devoted to primary synthesis. This class begins with a model dialogue/polylogue presentation (listening to a tape). Full comprehension is ensured with the aid of tapescripts with parallel translation into the native language (comprehensible input). The model presentation is followed by "guided communication" ("guided comprehensible output") when students are stimulated to communicate in situations identical to those of a model dialogue/polylogue using tapescripts, handed out prompt-cards and other "speech supports" as guides ("skeletons") for their own speech. This activity is performed in pairs and small groups in the form of guided role-playing with students' imitating interlocutors of the model dialogue/polylogue but supplying their own personal information in their talk and gradually distancing themselves from the model. Different language and communicative games are also widely employed.

The second class in the unit is devoted to analysis: conscious analysing of principal grammatical structures and vocabulary items in the model dialogue/polylogue - those the students were already using in their own speech during the first class. Analysis is followed by relevant "communicative drills" taking about 90% of the class time. In such drills, while practising in using various language forms, learners have some communicative microproblems to solve as their explicit task. For instance, they may be asked to talk to a speaker (a language lab activity done with the aid of a tape-machine). A student is required to negate the speaker's statements supplying information which is true to fact. Thus, learners are explicitly engaged in an activity somewhat imitating communication with simultaneous implicit practising in using negative and affirmative sentence structures. The "communicative drills" are done as computer-assisted activities and language lab (tape-machine)-assisted activities with students practising individually.

The third class in the unit is assigned to communicative synthesis. Communicative skills making free unguided communication possible get developed on the basis of everything the students learned or acquired during the previous two classes. The activities commonly include topical role-playing, problem-solving, talks and discussions with no overt guidance as to the form and subject matter of speech. The teacher only sets problems to discuss, describes or creates communicative situations in which learners are encouraged to communicate in English using their own judgements, understanding, pursuing communicative goals set by themselves, mobilizing all the language resources at their disposal.

In the following units the same routine is observed, but using new situations, new communication topics, new language material on the basis of communicative skills and language forms already acquired.

The Immersion Course "Starting Business Relations"

The materials for it include: a student's book, a teacher's book, a set of cassettes. About 1500 new words and word combinations are introduced in the Course, but no new grammar is learned as all the grammar required for oral communication is presented in the Survival Course. The structure of the Course and each unit in the teaching/learning process, the methods of teaching are similar to those used in

the Survival Course, but there are no analytic phases in units so that the primary synthesis is followed directly by the communicative synthesis.

Many learning activities are designed as simulations (e.g., a simulation of a company's Executive Board meeting devoted to discussing financial questions). Thus, all the instruction process is organized as teaching business communication through business communication in conditions modelling it. The other principal forms of learning activities are discussions of business issues and short lectures on them, brainstorming, students' individual presentations where some ways of solving business problems are considered and such like. Thus, learning Business English students learn business itself or vice versa (immersion).

The course of Oral English for Business Purposes was taught as an experimental one during 1993/1994 and 1994/1995 academic years under the auspices and on the premises of Dnepropetrovsk Institute of Teachers' Post-Graduation Training. All in all, 200 students were enrolled, the lowest enrollment age being thirteen and the highest being sixty years of age. The two years of experimental teaching were necessary for determining the learning outcomes (using the methods described below) as these outcomes were to serve for evaluating the efficiency of the course as a whole and its separate parts. With the years of experimental teaching over and all the necessary evaluations done, the intensive partial immersion ESP programme discussed above has been functioning as a commercial course (since 1995/1996 academic year).

## 4. METHODS OF DETERMINING AND EVALUATING LEARNING OUTCOMES

### Students

In the years of experimental teaching out of the total number of students only those who had practically no communicative competence in English before getting enrolled were selected for evaluating learning outcomes (34 students in 1993/1994 academic year and 51 student in 1994/1995 academic year). All the students were highly motivated, but they were of different ages (from 13 to 60 years old) and came from different walks of life (engineers, doctors, bank employees, industrial workers, school and university level students, businessmen and others). Such occupational and age diversity suited the evaluation purposes since it was necessary to find out how efficient the communicative-analytic approach embodied in the course and the intensive partial immersion programme itself were for teaching English to a variety of Russian (Ukrainian)-speaking adult and adolescent learners.

All the students were tested for evaluating learning outcomes after the Survival Course. But after the Business Course only l9 students out of 34 were tested in 1993/1994 academic year, and only 30 out 51 in 1994/1995 academic year. The others discontinued their learning after the Survival Course due to various personal reasons (mainly because the majority of them just did not need Business English and the autonomous Survival Course was quite sufficient).

### Testing and Evaluation Procedure

The first of the two tests after the Survival Course was a speaking test. Every student talked to another one in front of 2 examiners. The subject matter of the conversation was defined by a speaking task (chosen blindfold) which outlined

the communicative situation and the role for interlocutors to assume in it. Communicative situations and roles were those related to the subject matter of the Survival Course. So, in this test dialogic speaking skills were tested. To get more accurate data every examinee was asked to take part in 5 such talks having different interlocutors and conversing in different communicative situations. The first test after the Business Course was organized identically, except the communicative situations and subject matter of speaking (business communication). But testing in the Business Course made one more speaking test necessary. Students' monologic speaking skills were tested since this kind of skill development was also one of the goals of teaching as more or less lengthy discourses are often required in business communication. Speaking test 2 procedure only slightly differed from that of speaking test I. Every individual student, and not a pair of them, delivered his/her presentation in front of 2 examiners in accordance with a blindfold chosen speaking task defining a topic to speak on and outlining the communicative situation in which the discourse was supposed to be delivered (every examinee was asked to deliver only one discourse).

The dialogic speaking skill development demonstrated by learners was evaluated by every examiner (independently of another examiner - both sets of scores were then negotiated by both examiners so as to determine the final score of every examinee) according to 8 pre-set criteria: 1)relevance of what was said to the communicative situation and prescribed roles; 2) grammatical, lexical, and phonological accuracy and adequacy of speech; 3) volume of speaking (number of generated utterances); 4) variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary used by a speaker; 5) fluency; 6) cohesion and coherence of speech; 7) the initiative character of speech as an indicator of speaker`s ability to stimulate and encourage the communicative exchange; 8) unhindered comprehension of interlocutors` speech. Only the first six of these criteria were used for evaluating students` monologic speaking skill development.

This criterion system made prominent different aspects of learners` speaking skills, and examiners had a fixed scale of points to evaluate every aspect (up to 10 points for each of the first six criteria and up to 20 points for criteria 7 and 8). According to this scale a learner could score up to 100 points for one conversation (dialogic speaking skills), all criteria being taken into account in scoring. Thus, a 500-point maximum could be scored in the Survival Course speaking test (5 dialogues) and in Business Course speaking test 1. If a student scored 450 and more points (90 % or more), his/her results were considered as very good. The failure score was 350 points and less (less than 75% of the points one could score). In Business Course speaking test 2 (monologic speaking skill development) an examine could not score more than 60 points (very good result at 54 points and more, and a failure score set at less than 45 points).

The second test in the Survival Course and the third test in the Business Course were listening tests. The students had to listen to tapes with recorded texts and do comprehension tasks after listening. The maximum of 70 points could be scored in the Survival Course listening test (60 points and more considered as a very good result, and less then 50 points - as a failure score). The maximum of 100 points could be scored in the Business Course listening test (a very good result at 90 points and more, and a failure score set at 75 points and less).

## 5. TEST/EVALUATION RESULTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Overall testing results (mean scores of all the students tested) obtained during 2 academic years are given below.

The Survival Course

| Academic Year | |
|---|---|
| 1993/1994 | 1994/1995 |
| Number of students tested | |
| 34 | 51 |
| Mean test score in the speaking test (dialogic speaking skills) | |
| 468.5 points out of 500 | 472.4 points out of 500 |
| Mean test score in the listening test (listening skills) | |
| 62.5 points out of 70 | 66.5 points out of 70 |

The Business Course

| Academic Year | |
|---|---|
| 1993/1994 | 1994/1995 |
| Number of Students Tested | |
| 19 | 30 |
| Mean test score in speaking test 1 (dialogic speaking skills) | |
| 480.5 points out of 500 | 472.8 points out of 500 |
| Mean test score in speaking test 2 (monologic speaking skills) | |
| 57.8 points out of 60 | 58.1 points out of 60 |
| Mean test score in the listening test (listening skills) | |
| 97.4 points out of 100 | 96.7 points out of 100 |

The mean test scores, as it can be seen from above, were very high and approaching the top scores. It indicates that individual students' results were as a rule as high (those individual results are not given as it would take too much space). It was really so, and no individual differences in learning outcomes which could be attributed to differences in age or occupation of the students were detected.

Statistical analysis of the test data (carried out following the standard procedure) demonstrated that in all the cases (p=0.95...0.99) all the sampling variance values were within the bounds of one and the same generalized variance. It means that the mean test scores given above accurately reflect individual students` scores in all kinds of tests so that individual deviations from these mean scores are not so great as to become statistically significant. Therefore, high mean test scores above reflect high individual scores of the overwhelming majority of students, and

similarly high testing/learning results may reasonably be expected of any other average group of abolescent or adult learners in identical teaching/learning/testing conditions.

All this can be considered as the proof of the programme`s (course`s) overall efficiency because, taking into account all the criteria used for evaluating students' performance in the testing process, the obtained results and their analysis provide sufficient evidence for asserting that practically all the learners acquired communicative competences required for speaking and listening in English. It enabled them:

1) to take part in a broad range of talks (including business negotiations), conversations, communicative exchanges to meet their own everyday or occupational requirements when on a business visit to an English-speaking country;
2) to initiate such communication, maintain it as long as needed; to be coherent in what they said in English and quite comprehensible to a native speaker (few major language errors);
3) to be sufficiently fluent while communicating and to use various grammatical structures and vocabulary to convey meanings accurately enough;
4) to speak to the point fully taking account of situational and other factors of communication, to make long statements, deliver coherent lengthy discourses in the sphere of business communication if needed;
5) to adequately comprehend what was said in everyday or business communication.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The intensive partial immersion course of Oral English for Business Purposes was indubitably a success with Ukrainian (Russian)-speaking adult and adolescent EFL students learning English in Ukrainian (Russian) language setting. This Course ensured high achievement rates for practically all the students, thereby proving its efficiency and the soundness and efficiency of the theoretical (communicative-analytic) approach underlying it. This approach is characterized by rational balancing of communicative and analytic activities in learning, with communication greatly prevailing over analysis. Due to it the latter is in a position to facilitate communicative competence development instead of blocking it as might have happened if analysis had become too prominent making teaching and learning formal.

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